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SUBJECT: U.S. GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEE REPATRIATION

REF: Nouakchott 704

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Introduction and Summary  
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¶1. As seen reftel, Mauritanian government has begun to act on President Abdallahi's courageous decision to put an end to the issue of Mauritanian refugees. The refugee issue has had lasting effects on the human rights of refugees and other victims of the 1989 Events, has impeded national reconciliation and has remained a thorn in Mauritania's relations with its neighbors. The initiative aims to return up to 20,000 Refugees from Senegal and Mali. UNHCR plans to launch an appeal in August. The USG should consider responding to the appeal.

¶2. Moreover, managing a population influx of this level will require a high degree of technical and operational capacity. The risk involved in granting refugees special access to food, housing and employment, is great if the populations in the receiving communities become resentful. The rapid influx of large populations will put pressure on a system with limited capacity to deliver services, not to mention an economy where unemployment was last measured above 30 percent. Therefore, some programs need to benefit the entire community.

¶3. In order to assist the Mauritanian Government in this vast undertaking, Post urges Department to provide as much political, financial, technical and in-kind support to this endeavor as possible. There are several ways beyond responding to the appeal that the USG can help. The Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSTCP), the Peace Corps, Democracy and Development Programs (DDP), and EUCOM Humanitarian Assistance Programs (HAP) would all serve as excellent vehicles for this much needed assistance. In addition, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the World Food Program (WFP) could both prove to be valuable partners in ensuring food security and building local governance capacity.

¶4. We should continue to publicly support the government in this endeavor, as the political consequences of failure are great. While public opposition is small and coming from the extreme ends of the spectrum, we suspect that there is more anxiety under the surface, especially from those quarters that profited from the 1989 Events or may have blood on their hands. The government has rightly limited the scope of this initiative to avoid too much pressure at once on the society. We should allow the reconciliation process to proceed at the pace the Mauritians feel comfortable.

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15. Presently, the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSTCP) plans to support youth centers, radio stations and civil society activities along the Malian and Western Sahara borders. Adding the Senegalese border to its geographic zones of interest would serve the dual purpose of building governance capacity and improving economic conditions in areas susceptible to radical ideology and supporting the institutions responsible for administering services to the returnees after they have arrived. By supporting youth centers, radio stations and civil society activities that target entire communities TSCTP funding would assist regional and local governments in preventing resentment towards returnees on the part of populations already present. In supporting the Mauritanian government's refugee repatriation efforts, TSTCP would bolster its capacity to quell ethnic tensions that could otherwise become a rallying point for radicals and extremists.

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Democracy and Development Programs

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16. Post recommends that Democracy and Development Program (DDP) funds be increased to allow for a program presence in areas receiving deportees while still providing the same level of support to projects underway elsewhere in the country. DDP currently includes the Ambassador's Self-Help Fund, the Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) and various accounts that support HIV/AIDS programs. Self-help programs traditionally put small amounts of funding towards regenerating untapped or decaying resources such as run-down school structures, health clinics or potential but unrealized income-generating activities. Doubling or tripling the amount of money allocated for Self-Help programs would allow Embassy

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Nouakchott to develop between ten and twenty projects focused specifically on communities along the Mauritanian-Senegalese border. The 20,000 deportees repopulating Mauritanian's Southern region will have lacked national identity and residence in their country of citizenship for nearly 20 years. Reintegrating these individuals into Mauritanian society will require that they understand their civilian rights as granted by the current government. An increase in DHRF would support this endeavor by allowing for the development of local civil organizations as well as sensitization and human rights awareness campaigns. Increased funds for HIV/AIDS programming would ensure that repatriated deportees possess all of the knowledge necessary to maintain low rates of HIV/AIDS.

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Peace Corps Assistance

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17. Peace Corps may also be an effective resource for the Mauritanian government in this regard. Peace Corps volunteers currently work in seven functional areas: including, Girls' Education and Empowerment (GEE), Environmental Education (EE), English Teaching (ED), Small Enterprise Development (SED), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Community Health Education (HE), and Agroforestry (AGFO). Volunteer sites have already been assigned for the 2007-2008 year, though Peace Corps might make a modest commitment to aiding returned deportees and the communities absorbing them through future volunteers or Crisis Corps. These endeavors would of course be contingent upon the support and articulated need of both the Mauritanian government and the local communities in which volunteers serve. Peace Corps' contribution must be initiated by the Government of Mauritania and must be separate from State Department diplomatic strategy for Mauritania.

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EUCOM Humanitarian Assistance

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18. EUCOM's Humanitarian Assistance (HAP) programs traditionally provide for infrastructure support in the form of health clinics, school equipment, wells and other physical structures that have a

direct and immediate impact on the surrounding communities. HAP programs have run the gamut from long-term, large-scale type projects such as health clinic and school construction to small-scale, short-term programs such as providing desks for schools where students previously sat on hard cement floors. These short-term style projects must cost less than USD 2,500 and can be targeted across communities several at time. By assisting local, regional and national governments' efforts and abilities to provide services to returnees and communities along the Senegalese border, HAP programs will enhance the legitimacy of a government that has been a reliable partner in the War on Terror and provide needed support to populations in the poorest regions of Mauritania.

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National Democratic Institute Programs  
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¶9. In a meeting with EmbOfs, NDI Resident Director and Senior Maghreb Region Representative Gerard Latulippe indicated that NDI has funding for peace and reconciliation programs from the National Endowment for Democracy. EmbOfs urged NDI to consider utilizing this funding first for local governance capacity building, noting that integrating returnees with host the population and equalizing delivery of services amongst residents and returnees will prove a considerable challenge. NDI should consider broader peace and reconciliation programs, such as creating a type of truth commission, when the government and people are ready.

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Financial Support for the World Food Program  
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¶10. Increased foreign assistance in the form of food donations, as well as financial and technical contributions to schools, clinics, wells, youth centers, and income generating activities will be essential. World Food Program (WFP) Representative indicated to Charge and Political Officer on July 31 that WFP plans to assess the economic situation of deportees who are to be repatriated as well as the areas where deportees will be settled. WFP expects to find high levels of poverty in both these areas and plans first to work through the current PRRO, then revise its budget in order to cover all of the food needs of the relevant populations. In addition WFP also plans to target the communities absorbing deportees in its next

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performance strategy, set to be implemented by January, 2008. FFP should consider an increased to donation for the present PRRO and consider contributing to the 2008 PRRO in order to assist this effort.

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Political Support  
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¶11. In our meeting with Didier Laye, the UNHCR representative stressed the importance of tri-partite agreements between Mauritania and UNHCR with Senegal and Mali. UNHCR is seeking partners' support to have the parties conclude the agreements to provide the proper framework for the operation and de-politicize the matter. The governments of Mali, and in particular Senegal, have made extremely positive statements about the program. The refugee issue remains an irritant in Senegalese-Mauritanian relations, such as when, in August 2005, a coalition of refugee groups sought assistance from President Wade for a return, to the dismay of the Mauritanian junta. Therefore, a tri-partite agreement codifying the commitments of the parties, and endorsed by partners, would go a long way to providing political support for the operation.

Koutsis